REVIEWS OF NEW FICTION

Himself He Never Saw

VERA. By the author of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden." Doubleday, Page & Co.

ADMIRERS of the witty though frequently caustic Elizabeth will find much to applaud in "Vera," her latest work, which contains many interesting close ups of the most unpleasant man in fiction.

The book can scarcely be called a novel. Rather it is an extraordinarily astute human document, a minute analysis of one particular kind of egoist. The reader is not so much told as left to infer just what havoc his egoism wrought in the lives of others—his acquaintances, his servants, his in-laws, but most especially his unfortunate wives, of whom there were, up to page 319, but two.

One feels certain, however, that there will be one or possibly two more, for Lucy, the sensitive and acutely suffering second victim who is being tenderly gathered to the egoist's breast as the curtain falls, is not, one passionately hopes, of the kind to submit long to Wemyss's selfish demands. She will escape, even if she has to resort to poor Vera's method.

Vera, the first wife, it should be explained, after fifteen years of having her spirit crushed under the appalling weight of Wemyss's egoism, escaped by the simple though nervy expedient of jumping out of a third story window. After all, when one's spirit is crushed, what matters a broken body?

The really brilliant achievement of the book is the careful manner in which the author has shown that Wemyss never for an instant suspected that he was an egoist, a brute and a spoiled baby. He saw himself as the most wholesome and sane and affectionate of men, pouring out on his undeserving wives a wealth of tenderness and unalloyed devotion.

Vera had never appreciated nor responded to his love. In the end Vera had grossly failed him, annoying him and hurting him even in her death, which had involved him in that most unpleasant episode, the inquest. Very well, he would forget Vera and the coldness with which she had met his love all those years. He would find solace in Lucy, and simultaneously give solace to her in her newly orphaned state.

We begin to realize, after reading "Vera," that perhaps the author is not, as some readers have thought, merely venting a dislike of the sterner sex in portraying Wemyss, but has rather attempted to show that not only Wemyss, but many of the world's egoists, male and female, are sublimely unaware of their utter selfishness, and go through the world firmly if a little sadly, believing that their splendid qualities are unappreciated.

You loathe Wemyss from first to last, you long to have Elizabeth go on and show us Lucy's rebellion, but you must admit that there was never an instant when Wemyss was not certain that he was right, and generous, and wholeheartedly devoted to his pathetic young bride. So, until universal peace or the grace of God or something shall wipe selfishness forever out of all men's hearts, perhaps a book like "Vera" can help us to be a bit more tolerant of the Wemysses of this world.

In any case, "Vera" is a book not to be missed, though it is not just the cheeriest thing of the season.

'In Tea Cup Time Of Hood and Hoop'

Georgette Heyer.

THE BLACK MOTH. By Georgette Heyer. Houghton Mifflin Company.

MUCH of the atmosphere of Austin Dobson's poem about that "tea cup time of hood and hoop and when the patch was worn" marks the pages of Georgette Heyer's romance, whose title is that of a wicked nobleman given to wearing highly picturesque black costumes and hovering about women until his wings are very badly scorched indeed.

To read of the heroine protesting to the Black Moth, otherwise the Duke of Andover, "Sir, Mr. Everard—whoever you are—if you have any spark of manliness in you, of chivalry, if you care for me at all, you will this instant set me down" is to catch the full flavor of the time and manner of the tale. But the Duke, who had posed as Mr. Everard while making love to Diana Beauleigh, had little chivalry. He carried Diana off to his ducal mansion against her will. And it took his brother-in-law to bring out whatever manliness the Duke possessed at the point of his sword.

There is much other sword play and gambling and dicing and chocolate drinking in this wholly artificial tale of England in the eighteenth century. The hero is an amateur highwayman for a time until he is saved from the possibility of ending his folly on the gallows through the intervention of a friend, the inevitable picturesque and mildly humorous Irishman. The tale, on the whole, is as graceful and as unsubstantial as the winged creature from which it takes its name.

Paris Remembers Peguy

LE MYSTERE DE LA CHARITE DE JEANNE D'ARC. By Charles Peguy. Paris: Edition de la Nouvelle Revue.

A FAITHFUL comrade, M. Lotte, has left this portrait of Peguy: "He is a small man, with rounded shoulders, crowded into a tight jacket, with enormous shoes on his feet, a little hat on his head, a peasant face, in which burn two sharp eyes."

In character equally disdainful of superficial elegance, he was a philosopher and poet who remembered his laboring ancestors, ploughing deep and straight his own furrow. He began as a free thinker, socialist, revolutionary and violent defender of Dreyfus, and closed his career in the second month of the war an ardent fighting patriot and a Catholic.

Nevertheless, no life was ever more truly constant under these changing aspects. His "Mystery of the Charity of Jeanne d'Arc," which has just been reissued, affirms and explains this fact. Though it appeared only three years before his death the subject of this volume was the same as that of his first published work, "The Mission of Jeanne d'Arc." The theme had filled his life and in it one may find the unity of his nature.

What is the Jeanne d'Arc of Peguy? Before all else the need of bringing salvation. *"Il faut sauver, qui sauver et comment sauver?"* That was her repeated question. That was the desire and the uncertainty that drove Peguy to try one path after another—divergent paths they were, but he sought one goal.

In his youth, caring little for ideas, he tried to save by the heritage of "Justice and Liberty" that came from the dying nineteenth century. Surrounded by a chosen group of young university men like himself he defended that heritage with a savage energy. In his *"Cahiers de la Quinzaine,"* a periodical founded to prepare men for a new revolution, he despatched without mercy all those who seemed to give up the Cause or to exploit it for their personal benefit. He found so many "betrayers" among his comrades that he finally separated himself from all. The heirs of the nineteenth century included many opposing types. They had been drawing apart for some time when the Moroccan incidents of 1911 widened the various lines of divergence.

Certain men of a broad European culture, like Romain Rolland, followed their course on a level above national hatreds toward a better humanity. In the case of Peguy, as in that of Halevy—in whom all the past of his people lived on—the safety of thought and of the humanity itself was confused with that of his country. The war seemed to Peguy a deliverance. More than ever Jeanne d'Arc was his heroine, identifying herself in his mind with the very being and the sufferings of France.

For the 500th anniversary of Jeanne d'Arc, which fell in the day of Kings, 1912, he first published his "Mystery." It follows the character of those early dramatic forms in which the people of the fifteenth century put upon the stage, with naive anachronisms, in a melange of affectionate reverence and familiarity, the saints, God the Father, Christ the Virgin. And Peguy found a fit theme for such a "Mystery" in the vocation of Jeanne, the humble shepherd, going forth to become a leader of armies, a savior of her country and her king.

It is only a dialogue between Jeanne, 13½ years old, and Mme. Gervaise, nun of a nearby abbey. It is the talk, at once profound and simple, of a child who is also a saint in the rapture of her first consciousness of Divine Grace; suave as it were the speech of a virgin in an ancient cathedral; thrilling with faith in her people and in her God. Here the youthful piety of Charles Peguy softens the rigor of the polemic debater. When he says *"le pays de France"* between two invectives against the seekers of the glory of this world, his obstinate verb melts into inevitable tenderness.

Jeanne is always in prayer. She is herself a prayer so ardent that it becomes an irresistible will to which the answer is already a fact. The mystery of her calling? Her charity—everything turns upon that. A heart enlarged by a sympathy without limit, a pity that feels hunger ever for those who are unaware of their own want. She suffers not alone for the misery of men but also for their apathy in the face of evil. And from the excess of her anguish is born the desire to fight against evil, to conquer at any cost, to save her own—France, Christendom, damned by war.

Charles Peguy faces the old dilemma—Is it not pride which under color of piety spurs us to action? On the other hand, is it not cowardly to fall back, is not despair the worst of sins?

"Work! That saves all . . . the sacred toil under the eyes of God. . . . It is all that we can do, all that we have to do: the rest is God's; we are in his hand." Undoubtedly that expresses the feeling of Peguy, man of the people and intellectual who did not have to "go to the people" for he remained always one of them. For him the highest dignity and the supreme privilege was to do one's task.

Madame Gervaise evokes the life, suffering and death of Jesus. After all the centuries, Charles Peguy dares to retrace the "magnificent adventure," to Mount Golgotha even after the sculptors and image makers of the thirteenth century, the giants of the Renaissance, the princes of the Church and the princes of the word. "The greatest story of heaven, the greatest story of earth"—never was it more living, miraculous and human, never more antique and yet of our own day, than in this poem of Peguy's.

We walk where the Nazarene walked, we touch the tools of the Carpenter. In the shop where he grew up we see, we feel "the rich color, the good smell of the wood when the bark is peeled off." The people of the drama are simple figures of all time. But the most moving is that of the Virgin. She asks not renunciation but only love. She is a poor mother, following near or far the funeral train of her son. The dryest sceptic cannot trace her footsteps unmoved.

Jeanne d'Arc rises above the apostles who denied or abandoned Christ. "If I had been there," she says, "I would not have left him." It is the obstinacy of the Lorraine peasant who knows not how to turn back, who cannot conceive denial. She says of the apostles, "They were not French, they were not knights of the Lorraine land. The men of the crusades would never have denied him." And she goes on murmuring, "Orleans, in the land of the Loire."

That is the name of the city which she delivered first, the name of her duty and destiny, the name of the town where the centuries will see France in the days of her defeat renew herself for another effort. And there was born Charles Peguy. The name of Orleans becomes a prayer in which hope cries its affirmative above the conflict in the voice of heroine and poet.

In his "Porche de la Deuxieme Vertu" Peguy follows that hope to heaven. Another poem, "Mystère du propre de l'Esperance," was to have completed the work. The ball which struck Peguy in the first battle of the Marne prevented the final achievement.

Charles Peguy, the man, is an incomparable figure of nobility and force. In the void left by the death of such beings one feels more deeply the tragic horror of Jeanne d'Arc as she contemplated war: "It is frightful that such a thing can exist, bearing upon it the malediction of Jesus and still walking a conqueror over all the ways of the world."

Over all the ways of the world. Bearing upon it the malediction of Jesus and the malediction of mothers and of all the noblest who have raised their voices on earth since there were men to make war.

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Don Diego Was a Great Lover

THE BLOOD OF THE CONQUERORS. By Harvey Fergusson. Alfred A. Knopf.

THE two Latin races which possess our continent have much in common. The first French Canadian novel had back to its soil for its motto. The Spanish-Americans of the Southwest have not become articulate in our literature, but they have found an able interpreter in Harvey Fergusson. He was born in

Harvey Fergusson.

New Mexico and has seen enough of other regions to size up the modern descendants of the Conquistadores. His story shows how Ramon Delcasar was defeated by the shabby trickery of Anglo-Saxons. He finally retired from competition to live as his forebears had done.

The Delcasar background is firmly sketched: "This thing called business was utterly strange to the Delcasars and the other Dons. They were men of the saddle, fighting men, and traders only in a primitive way. Business seemed to them a conspiracy to take their lands and their goods away from them, and a remarkably successful conspiracy. Debt and mortgage and speculation were the names of its weapons."

Don Diego and Felipe Delcasar were the last of the family to have any economic footing. The others either moved back to old Mexico or sank to the level of peons. Don Diego was a chip of the old block. "It was said that one could follow his wanderings about the territory by the sporadic occurrence of the unmistakable Delcasar nose among the younger inhabitants. All of his sons and daughters by the left hand he treated with notable generosity. He was a sort of hero to the native people—a great fighter, a great lover—and songs about his adventures were composed and sung around the fires in sheep camps and by gangs of track workers."

Ramon, the nephew of Don Diego, was the first of his race to face modern civilization. He studied at a modern law school. He became enamoured of Julia Roth, a girl of the invaders. He profited by his uncle's assassination by a man the Don had cheated, and for a while Ramon was successful in his plans of fighting fire with fire. He even joined the fanatic order of Penitentes in order to have greater influence with MacDougall, his opponent in land deals. However, his craft was not sufficient for him to win out against the gringoes, and the final chapter shows his success in returning to the old life of his forebears.

To See the Elephant Jump the Fence

THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN. By Lebbeus Mitchell. Little, Brown & Co.

OLD and young love the big tent, the elephants and the parade. Many a daddy to-day can recall the days when he carried pails of water to the elephants to earn his pass to the circus because mother or dad would not or could not put in his outstretched palm the necessary shining piece of money which would purchase the ticket.

Ask your mother for fifty cents
To see the elephant jump the fence
He jumped so high he hit the sky
And never came down till the Fourth of July.

But little orphan Jerry did not know that elephants could not jump the fence, though he did find out that they could do many other things, even to the extent of leading him to the missing happiness in his sorrowful little life, for Jerry was not yet 7.

This is a book written by an author very familiar with children, who understands their plays and their joys and sorrows. She writes in a style pleasing to young and old, for after dad has read the story to the children he will take them on his knee and tell them about the time he first saw a circus, and our little city boys and girls will appreciate Jerry more than ever.

John Dos Passos, author of "Three Soldiers," is an artist as well as a poet and novelist. An exhibition of some twenty-five or thirty water colors made by Mr. Dos Passos during his recent trip through France and Spain was held at the National Arts Club last month.